

206 JOZEF: A Life in Two Worlds

Jeus is thinking suddenly of the black cloud where he has been hiding with Anny. That was the one that brought down the cloudburst.

"Where do you come from, Jeus?" asks Crisje. "Couldn't you watch out for the rain? Where were you?"

"We were playing up in the clouds, mother."

Mother Crisje has become used to a great many things, but every time she is surprised anew. "What did you say? In the clouds? You have played in the clouds? With whom?" While mother is changing his clothes, he is telling her of the play in the clouds. And the next day the whole neighborhood is talking about it.

"Your boy, Crisje, that's a good one. My boy has been in the clouds with Jeus and he came home as wet as a cat. Of course, Jeus was only fooling, just like his father who is fooling people so much, what?"

That's what the neighbors are thinking and soon the other children are making fun of Jeus. "The way he's playing—and fooling, ha, ha . . ."

And mother says: "Well, you shouldn't fool them, then. You have been going too far, see? That's not nice."

But Jeus knows better, especially since he has been going through Paradise again with Jos£. And Jos£ told him that it was the long man who had made it possible for the children to play in the clouds.

After this Jeus preferred much to go out alone with his dog Vanny. "Those little nitwits, Vanny, they only make trouble for you, see? They'd rather not learn anything about Paradise."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Angels don't steal

The day of the village-fair is approaching, everybody is talking about it. Bernard cannot talk enough about all the wonderful things which he has seen at the fair the year before.

There was a merry-go-round where you could ride on a white horse around and around, and a woman with a beard and it cost only a penny to look at her and two cents to pull at the whiskers, and a "ring-the-bell" which you had to hit with a hammer as hard as you could, and tents where they sell candies. And not to forget the trained fleas and the men who can eat fire . . .

And now Jeus is going to see all these wonderful things himself! Mother has promised him that he may go this year. He wants to have a lot of money for he intends to see everything. How obedient he is these days, and willing to

run errands! He is going from house to house to see if he can't earn a penny or two. All the peasants are taking notice. Counting the two cents which Gerrit Noesthede has given him he is now as rich as four cents!

"May I still do anything for you, mother?"

"That's nice of you, Jeus, but won't you rather go and play? Then I'll do my errand myself."

"No, mother, I'll be glad to do it for you."

"Well, then go over to Teet Egging and get me some coffee, what? Teet knows what kind I'm getting."

207

208 JOZEF: A Life in Two Worlds

As he comes back, mother says: "Thank you, Jeus," and then she returns to her work. He still hangs around for a while but Mother Crisje acts as if she didn't notice it. Jeus is disappointed and runs outside. Mother could have given him a cent, at least . . . Maybe he'll be luckier with Aunt Trui. Yes, she, too, has a lot of errands to do, and he carries them all out quickly and accurately. As a reward she gives him—a piece of liverwurst and she acts as if he should even be happy about it. He turns it around in his hands and then he says:

"Could you sell that, Aunt Trui?"

"Why, you want to sell my best liverwurst? What's the reason?"

"For the town-fair, Aunt Trui."

"That's a long way off, Jeus. You eat your liverwurst and then when the fair comes here, we'll see, what?"

No. No luck today. He sits down in front of the house and leans with his back against the fence. Vanny is lying down next to him, his tongue hanging out of his mouth.

"Look there now, Vanny," says Jeus. From below the gravel road two ladies are coming. These are probably the rich people of which mother has told him once. You can see that they have money, by the big hats and the fine clothes they are wearing and one of them has a pair of eyeglasses with a handle hanging on her chest while the other one is walking with a stick, probably because she's old. Now they are quite near Jeus. He looks straight at them, into their eyes so that they have to look at him in return. Jeus is thinking of the fair. Now the ladies stop.

"Well, little fellow, how nicely you're playing with your dog. What's your name?"

"Jeus, ma'm."

Angels

Angels don't steal 209

"Jeus,—that's a nice name. And your dog?"

"Vanny, ma'm."

"What a polite little boy," says the lady to the other one. "And that out here in the country! Where do you live, Jeus?"

"Don't I get anything?" thinks Jeus and says: "Here, ma'm, in this house here."

"Do you like sweets?"

Jeus has jumped up. At last! But at this moment there is mother, she is standing at the garden fence:

"I hope that the child isn't begging, is he?"

"No, ma'm, not at all. But he may have some sweets, or do you mind?"

They give him five cents but mother lets him keep only one.

"If you do that again, Jeus, I'll tell daddy, and then you know what's going to happen."

But this warning has little effect on Jeus. It only makes him more careful, that's all. The following day he lies again in front of the garden gate, but this time more towards the house of Aunt Trui, so that Crisje cannot see him. After about an hour a lady is passing by with a gentleman. And again Jeus acts as he did yesterday. He looks at the couple until they stop. The lady speaks to him:

"What beautiful eyes you have, my boy."

"Yes, ma'm," agrees Jeus.

She, too, wants to know his name. Well, Jeus is more than willing to tell her. It's going to be five cents, maybe even ten, Jeus has figured it all out already.

The gentleman is digging into his pocket. "Would you like to have a dime?" Now, he surely would. He is already standing up. But just as he is reaching for the dime, Long

210 JOZEF: A Life in Two Worlds

Hendrik is stepping between him and the gentleman. His daddy, Long Hendrik! And his face, usually so friendly, is now sad and severe at the same time. "But Jeus," says he, "What are you doing now,—you're really begging, heh?"

The blood is rushing to Jeus' cheeks, his hand is falling back, then he runs away, and the lady and gentleman are looking after him in confusion.

He has made his daddy sad, and that is enough for him to cry for hours. Even Vanny cannot console him now, only the long man, his friend himself could. And suddenly he is standing there right in front of him. "You must never do that again, Jeus, or I will not come to you any more."

No, Jeus will never do it again, never.

And one nice morning on a Saturday, big, colorful wagons are coming down the gravel road. Bernard sees them first, and together they are following the wagons.

"The fair wagons," says he, and he is right. The wagons are going up to the place where the fair is to open. What a colorful, strange world is showing itself before the astonished eyes of the children: poles and tentcloth and ropes together make booths and tents and merry-go-rounds, and all the little boys are standing around and you could not chase them away. Too bad, thinks Jeus, that he has only very little money left of his savings,—but mother will surely let him have some more!

One more night now, and the fair will be open . . .

That night before they go to bed Jeus is talking with his little brothers Gerrit and Hendrik and tells them about all the things which he is going to see tomorrow.

"There are merry-go-rounds with white horses and men who eat fire and a woman with a beard and the grown-ups may hit it with a hammer, see?"

Angels don't steal 2H

After High Mass the fair begins. Mother is counting all her change, then she says:

"Jan, here's a dime. Bernard, you get seven cents, and you, Jeus, you get five cents. But don't forget today you won't get any more from me, see, for tomorrow is town fair, too. And now go and have a good time!"

"Where are you going first, Jan?" asks Jeus.

"I don't know yet. I've to see first."

"And you, Bernard?"

"I don't know either. And you?"

"I'll go to the merry-go-round, to sit on a horse and I'm going to ride it so that the sparks will fly."

At the fair it's like in hell's kitchen. The loud music from the merry-go-rounds, the screaming of the barkers and acrobats who are offering their world-famous acts to an honorable—and gullible—public, the hammering on the "ring-the-bell" as well as the noise that the public is making itself,—all this combines into a symphony of confusion.

For a moment the children are standing still, then they plunge right into the frolicking crowd. And before they know it they are separated from each other but they don't even notice it, there are so many things to hear and to see.

It did not take Jeus long to find the merry-go-round with the white horses. He picks his horse and as soon as the machine is stopping to get ready for a new ride, he runs to it and with the aid of a tall boy he swings himself into the saddle. He is sitting comfortably on his wooden animal, but presently, as soon as it will hear the snappy music, it will shoot off, like an arrow from the bow. Too bad, thinks Jeus, that he cannot stand up in his stirrups,

but his little legs are still too short. But also without the
212 JOZEF: A Life in Two Worlds

stirrups his horse shall carry him away quick as lightning.
There goes the bell; Jeus is grabbing the bridle more
firmly with his little fists. The music starts to play and
suddenly underneath him it begins to rumble—the horse is
moving! How he has been longing for this moment! People
and tents and houses and trees are shooting past him.
He is sitting proudly on his horse and the trip is only half
over when he decides already to stay on for the next one;
of course he wants to keep this fast and trusty mare for
that next trip.

Jeus is happy. He is now reconciled with this world
where everybody seems to do his best to make him happy:
the people who have put up this merry-go-round, the boy
who has helped him to climb on, the white horse that is
carrying him on his strong back, and last not least the people
around who almost all are pointing at Jeus and say:
Look at him, a natural-born horseman!

For the fourth time now Jeus has bought the horse for
a ride. On his back Jeus' imagination is running riot. This
horse never gets tired. He takes the highest hurdles and
goes through space with the greatest of ease. For hours he
runs and there's no end except the bell that interrupts
now and then. Jeus is rich, really rich now. . . .

The music stops, the horse stands still and two hands are
lifting Jeus off, setting him on the ground. And now Jeus
suddenly isn't rich any more; he has only one cent left in
his pocket and the horse with the name "Phantasy" is making
off without him. . . .

And the fair doesn't look so friendly any more now that
his pennies are gone. He is standing at a tent where a
melancholy looking man is trying to draw the people in,
telling them that inside "there is the world-famous king

Angels don't steal 213

of the chain who has already performed before the emperor
of China,—ladies and gen'lmen, the performance is
ready to begin, with an extra to boot: the barefoot dance
on a carpet of sword points, unheard of, my good people—"
and the melancholy man is telling Jeus that he has been
standing there long enough now and that he has to go in.
As if Jeus were to blame that nobody is interested in the
chain trick and the dance of the bare feet, ha . . .

With his last penny Jeus is buying himself a few friendly
words and a candy stick.

Then he goes back to the merry-go-round, just to look.

And the merry-go-round looks suddenly different, now.

Those horses are not even alive, hm . . . no, farmer

Hosman's horses, they whinny at least and are so beautiful

and warm to touch. Big Piet, for instance sniffs at you so nicely, but these horses here, they're just beanstalks, ha. White horses? Why there's hardly any paint left on these wooden things, hm, and how short these rides are! The people are hardly on their horses and they have to get off already. Those merry-go-round people are only after your pennies! They don't care if you are having fun or not. To the dickens with 'em!

Jeus is still loitering on the fairgrounds but the turmoil and the crowd is becoming annoying. It is dinnertime now, anyway. Father is home because it is Sunday and then it isn't wise to be late for dinner. Sadly, with his hands in his pockets Jeus is shuffling home. In disgust he is kicking the little stones that are in his way. If he'd meet Gerrit Noesthede now by accident, or Jan Maandag, maybe he'd get a penny then. But he doesn't meet anybody. All the people are at the fair or they're sitting at home killing the time of Sunday.

214 JOZEF: A Life in Two Worlds

Mother sees his long face and says: "What are you making such a long face for, Jeus? Have you spent all your pennies already? You know that you're not getting any more from me today. After all, we have to eat, too." And father threatens with the cellar.

After dinner he asks Bernard: "Do you have any money left?"

"I still have five cents," says Bernard.

"And you, Jan?"

Jan still has his dime. "What a piker he is," thinks Jeus.

"He wouldn't chance anything." But these two can now go back to the fair and he has to stay home.

"Do you still need anything, mother?"

"No, and I won't give you anything either. No is no."

Then let's try Aunt Trui, thinks Jeus. She won't give much, though.

"Aren't you going to the fair, Jeus?" asks Aunt Trui.

"I have been there already, Aunt Trui, but I have no more spending money," says Jeus straight out.

"Well, didn't mother give you anything?"

"Yes, but I haven't got it any more, the fair clowns have it. And they only drink it up in whiskey, anyway."~Then he realizes that it was stupid to say that, he's only giving Aunt Trui a reason not to give him any money. And sure enough, she says:

"Then you better not go there any more. That's no good, Jeus, you better stay home."

Out in the street he feels like kicking himself with his own clogs: If I only could keep my mouth shut!

But it doesn't do any good to reproach himself. Leaning against a door post he looks at the farmstead of the Hosmans'.

Nobody seems to be home there, they've gone to
Angels don't steal 215

the fair, all of them. If Chang and Carlo were here, yes, then he would sell himself to them to go to Italy. For a dime they can have him, yes. But no, a dime isn't really enough. Well, then a quarter. But that isn't enough either. What can you get for a quarter? Another quarter hour is passing by. Tired of standing around he goes to the little yard to lie on the bench. Behind that bench there is a lilac bush. Through a gap in tire foliage he can see a piece of the sky. Minutes are passing by and then Jeus feels a silence coming over him and it is as quiet as if he were all alone in this world. He knows this and what it means. The last time he felt it was when he made that trip to the clouds. Something strange happens: Through the gap in the lilac bush a white cord is coming down and Jeus sees in astonishment how it is crawling on the ground, out of the little yard, over the gravel road and then into the woods. It is like a glistening string and there seems no end to it. Jeus is still asking himself where it may be leading him when he feels that he is freed from his body, and while his little body is remaining on the bench, his spirit is following the cord quick as a bird.

Unerringly tire cord has gone on all kinds of paths and roads and suddenly it stops.

"Good heavens," cries Jeus. In the place where the string has brought him in such a miraculous way there are guilders, quarters, dimes and pennies. He counts them, and it is fourteen guilders and sixteen cents. Jeus wants to pick it up but he can't; it remains on the ground. Then he understands that he needs his body to pick the money up, the body which he has left behind on the bench. Quick as lightning he returns into his body which is now awakening from a deep sleep and then he goes back to the woods
216